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The word on U-233 at Oak Ridge

Knox News

April 28, 2016

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The old stockpile of uranium-233 at Oak Ridge National Laboratory has been an ongoing concern for years, with twists and turns in the planning process and always questions about the ultimate cost of the project. How many hundreds of millions of dollars is it going to take to get these fissionable and highly radioactive materials disposed of safely?3019

The Department of Energy, after protracted negotiations with the state of Nevada, is apparently proceeding with direct disposal of some of the U-233/U-235 stuff — characterized by its former life as “CEUSP” or Consolidated Edison Uranium Solidification Project — at the Nevada National Security Site.

But there hasn’t been much said about those shipments from Oak Ridge to the Nevada desert, apparently because of security concerns regarding the cross-country transportation of sensitive materials. It’s not clear how much progress has been made in completing the CEUSP work.

There are, of course, other U-233 materials in storage at ORNL’s Building 3019 that have to be dealt with, and DOE has said it plans to downblend those materials with

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depleted uranium, apparently to eliminate the weapons-making potential, and dispose of them as low-level radioactive waste.

Asked for an update on plans to process the U-233, Mike Koentop, executive officer of DOE's Office of Environmental Management in Oak Ridge, said via email:

"We are currently preparing for the processing campaign, and depending on funding, could begin processing in the early 2020s. Once processing begins, we estimate the campaign will take approximately three and a half years to complete and at a cost of approximately \$18-20 million annually."

Koentop said the cost estimate does not include the funding necessary to maintain Building 3019 — where it's being stored — while processing is ongoing.

"After processing, the resulting material will be disposed as low-level waste," he said. "However, we have not yet determined which disposal facility we will use."

The Department of Energy earlier moved stocks of depleted uranium from Savannah River to Oak Ridge to prepare for the U-233 project.

According to Koentop, the Oak Ridge project will not need all of the depleted uranium acquired from Savannah River because the CEUSP materials are being directly disposed of in Nevada.

"We will use a portion of the DU for processing and the remainder of the DU inventory will be shipped for disposal starting this year," he said.

MOX gets mixed grades from Energy Department

Augusta Chronicle

April 28, 2016

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The Department of Energy gave the consortium building the mixed-oxide fuel processing facility at Savannah River Site an overall grade of 49 percent in its most recent annual review.

That grade earned it a \$4.3 million fee, just less than half of the \$8.9 million that could have been awarded for flawless work.

The consortium, CB&I Areva MOX Services, received verbal ratings of “satisfactory” in six categories, “very good” in one and “excellent” in two. The numerical grades ranged from 23 to 94 percent. A grade of 1-50 percent is considered satisfactory.

Company spokesmen referred questions to Westinghouse Electric Co., but its director of corporate communications, Gentry Brann, did not respond to requests for comment.

The Energy Department did not immediately make available the consortium’s self-assessment.

One anti-nuclear organization offered a scathing assessment of its own.

“While (the National Nuclear Security Administration) rates the performance of MOX Services as only satisfactory, NNSA itself earns an even lower rating for allowing this unacceptable and chronic situation to drag on,” said Tom Clement, the director of Savannah River Site Watch. “At a time when construction problems should have been worked out, it’s clear that neither CB&I Areva MOX Services nor the NNSA have the project under control.”

A pro-nuclear group raised the possibility that the rating was negatively slanted to reflect the Obama administration’s desire to halt the project, which is designed to convert weapons-grade plutonium into commercial reactor fuel.

“As a contractor, I never liked having a lot of money in the award fee because you can see from the write-up it’s very subjective,” said Mike Johnson, the executive director of Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness. “If it’s written to support the administration’s position, it could be.”

Government contracts often include provisions for earning an “award fee” or bonus as an incentive. Evaluations are done with input from self-assessments by the contractors at the completion of each federal fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30.

“The award fee for the MOX project is designed to focus performance in areas that are critical to well-managed, safe, high-quality construction,” said Thom Metzger, the NNSA’s director of public affairs. “MOX Services did not meet NNSA’s expectations in several areas this year, and that performance is reflected in the final award fee determination. Through this process, and communications between the federal team at the Savannah River Site and MOX Services leadership, NNSA has identified areas for MOX Services to focus on improving in (fiscal year) 2016.”

Among the areas cited for improving were schedule performance, cost efficiency and project change control.

Those areas getting the highest scores were quality assurance, safety and security.

Alexander, ORNL and heavy water

Knox News

April 28, 2016

[LINK](#)

An amendment to the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Bill for FY 2017 was filed earlier this week by U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., that would prevent the government from using taxpayer money to purchase additional quantities of heavy water from Iran. The amendment has not been adopted at this point, but the discussions about the Obama administration’s dealings with Iran may stall the progress of the appropriations bill.

However, it will not, according to multiple accounts, have an impact on the deal that was signed last week for the purchase of 32 tons of heavy water, which will be stored at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Part of that acquired inventory will be

used to enhance neutron production at the Spallation Neutron Source in Oak Ridge, and the rest will reportedly be sold to qualified buyers for use in research and industrial applications.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., who chairs the Senate Appropriations energy and water subcommittee is a primary architect of the 2017 energy and water bill.

Asked for the senator's view on the heavy water purchase and potential use in Oak Ridge, Alexander press secretary Louie Brogdon said, "Oak Ridge National Laboratory and American companies need heavy water to make fiber optics, microprocessors and support important research in material and biological sciences. Sen. Cotton has raised questions about a serious issue, and Sen. Alexander is working with him and studying it carefully."

Process Begins for Deactivation Bids at DOE Plant

West Kentucky Star

April 29, 2016

[LINK](#)

PADUCAH, KY - The U.S. Department of Energy has issued a Draft Request for Proposals for deactivation and remediation services at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

In a Thursday press release, the DOE said the request is in anticipation of awarding a contract for the purpose of providing deactivation and remediation services at the plant. The Draft RFP provides for full and open competition, and covers a prospective period of ten years.

The current deactivation and remediation services contract at PGDP is held by Fluor Federal Services and expires on July 21, 2017.

The purpose of the Draft RFP is to solicit input from interested parties, which will help the DOE in developing a Final RFP for this project. All interested parties should

examine the document and the accompanying website before submitting comments to DOE.

A pre-solicitation conference and site tour with interested parties is scheduled for the week of May 16, and registration information is available at the website.

The deactivation and remediation services include but are not limited to: Transition; Project Management Support;

Stabilization & Deactivation (including deposit / hold-up removal, 99Tc Thermal Treatment, Freon Disposition); On-Site Waste Disposal Facility (OSWDF) design; Surveillance and Maintenance; Utilities Operations; and Environmental (Solid Waste Management Units (SWMUs) 211 A&B and C-400 Groundwater Remediation).

Additional information is available via the procurement website at:

<https://www.emcbc.doe.gov/SEB/PaducahDandR/>

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions signs consent order to take steps to correct safety compliance concerns

Aiken Standard

April 29, 2016

[LINK](#)

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, or SRNS, signed a consent order with the U.S. Department of Energy, or DOE, last Friday, agreeing to terms of reconciliation for safety compliance shortfalls last year.

SRNS, the company contracted by the DOE to run operations at Savannah River Site, or SRS, initiated an operation pause and months-long return to normal operations.

According to SRNS officials and previous reporting by the Aiken Standard, high winds were to blame for the first issue of concern in early 2015. Storms disconnected a ground wire, short-circuiting the agitators in H Area tanks designed

to process aqueous nuclear material. In September, a first-line manager and several employees put three plutonium samples into storage in containers that were not approved for plutonium storage.

All compliance violations were self-reported by SRNS, and the company began paperwork to reach a settlement with the DOE in December 2015.

The order of consent requires SRNS to meet several objectives, as well as pay a fine. The company must complete their submitted corrective action plans and must arrange an effectiveness review and nuclear safety assessment to be conducted by independent, external parties. They must also pay a \$175,000 penalty to the DOE.

Thomas Gardiner is the SRS beat reporter for the Aiken Standard. Thomas is originally from Texas and studied at USC Aiken.

PGDP Citizens Advisory Board Seeking Members

WKMS

May 2, 2016

[LINK](#)

The Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant Citizens Advisory Board is seeking new membership from residents in western Kentucky and southern Illinois.

The board provides input to the U.S. Department of Energy regarding cleanup efforts and possibly future use of the PDGP site.

The plant produced enriched uranium for nuclear power plants for more than half a century before closing in 2013.

Those interested in applying can contact the CAB office at 270-554-3004.

[Paducah Citizens Advisory Board website.](#)

Borehole Plan Now Targets South Dakota

KXNET

April 28, 2016

[LINK](#)

Organizers of a federal effort to assess whether nuclear waste can be stored deep underground are trying to better explain their intentions to South Dakota residents after getting rebuffed in North Dakota.

Battelle, the nonprofit managing the project, said Thursday it is considering sites near Redfield, South Dakota.

The U.S. Energy Department project is meant to help determine whether deep boreholes are suitable for nuclear waste disposal. The plan first surfaced in North Dakota this winter when test holes were proposed near Rugby.

The idea was dropped after widespread opposition in the Rugby area.

Battelle is planning at least two open meetings in Spink County near the end of April to answer questions from the community about the proposed research.

Bipartisan Committee Leaders Seek DOE Update on Nuclear Smuggling Deterrence Programs

House Committee on Energy and Commerce Press Release

May 2, 2016

“Given the current threat environment, now is not the time to weaken our detection and interdiction programs overseas.”

Commerce Committee today sent a letter to Department of Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz seeking further information on the current status of the National Nuclear Security Administration’s (NNSA) Nuclear Smuggling Detection and Deterrence programs (NSDD).

“We write today because recent international developments – particularly the rise of well-funded terror groups and the curtailment of U.S.-Russian cooperation on nuclear material security – have underscored the importance of NNSA’s Nuclear Smuggling Detection and Deterrence programs. These developments have prompted us to take a closer look at the status of these programs,” wrote the bipartisan leaders. They noted that information reviewed to date has highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong deterrence and detection posture at foreign ports and border crossings, in partnerships with other nations.

The NSDD has spent approximately one billion dollars over the past five years working with 59 partner countries, prompting the leaders to write, “the Committee seeks to increase its understanding of expenditures, technological development, and the progress of international cooperation with the program. Having full information about these matters is necessary to ensure any decisions concerning the course of this program do not inadvertently undermine its important security mission. Given the current threat environment, now is not the time to weaken our detection and interdiction programs overseas.”

The letter was signed by:

- Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI);
- Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman Tim Murphy (R-PA);
- Energy and Commerce Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ); and
- Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Ranking Member Diana DeGette (D-CO).

To read the letter online, click [here](#).

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